

It is but benestraw and greet forage.  
And eek this olde wydwes, God it woot,  
They konne so muchel craft on Wades boot,  
So muchel broken harm, whan that hem leste,  
That with hem sholde I nevere lyve in reste;  
for sondry scoles maken so tile clerkis;  
Womman of manye scoles half a clerk is.  
But certeynly, a yong thyng may men gye,  
Right as men may warm wex with handes plye.  
Wherefore I sey yow pleynly, in a clause,  
I wol noon oold wyf han right for this cause.  
for if so were, I hadde swich myschaunce  
That I in hire ne koude han no plesaunce,  
Thanne sholde I lede my lyf in avoutrye,  
And go streight to the devel whan I dye.  
Ne children sholde I none upon hire geten;  
Yet were me levere boundes had me eten,  
Than that myn heritage sholde falle  
In straunge hand, and this I telle yow alle.  
I dote nat; I woot the cause why  
Men sholde wedde, and forthermore woot I  
Ther speket many a man of mariage,  
That woot namore of it than woot my page,  
for whiche causes man sholde take a wyf.  
If he ne may nat lyven chaast his lyf,  
Take hym a wyf with greet devocioun,  
Bycause of leveful procreacioun  
Of children, to thonour of God above,  
And nat oonly for paramour or love;  
And for they sholde lecherye eschue,  
And yelde hir dettes whan that they ben due;  
Or for that ech of hem sholde helpen oother  
In meschief, as a suster shal the brother,  
And lyve in chastitee ful holty.  
But sires, by youre leve, that am nat I,  
for, God be thanked, I dar make avaunt,  
I feele my lymes stark and suffisaunt  
To do al that a man bilongeth to;  
I woot myselven best what I may do.  
Though I be hoor, I fare as dooth a tree  
That blosmeth er that fruyt ywoven bee;  
And blosmy tre nys neither drye ne deed.  
I feele me nowher hoor but on myn heed;  
Myn herte and alle my lymes been as grene  
As laurer thurgh the yeer is for to sene.  
And syn that ye han herd al myn entente,  
I prey yow to my wyl ye wole assente.  
**D**IVERSE men diversely hym tolde  
Of mariage manye ensamples olde.  
Somme blamed it, somme preyed it,  
certeyn;  
But atte laste, shortly for to seyn,  
As al day falleth altercacioun  
Bitwixen freendes in disputacioun,  
Ther fil a stryf bitwixen his bretheren two,  
Of whiche that oon was cleped Placebo,  
Justinus soothly called was that oother.  
**P**LACEBO seyde, O Januarie, brother,  
ful litel nede hadde ye, my lord so deere,  
Conseil to axe of any that is heere;  
But that ye been so ful of sapience,  
That yow ne liketh, for youre heighe prudence,  
To weyven fro the word of Salomon.

This word seyde he unto us everychon:  
Mirke alle thyng by conseil, thus seyde he,  
And thanne shaltow nat repente thee.  
But though that Salomon spak swich a word,  
Myn owene deere brother and my lord,  
So wistly God my soule brynge at reste,  
I holde youre owene conseil is the beste,  
for brother myn, of me taak this motyf,  
I have now been a court man al my lyf,  
And, God it woot, though I unworthy be,  
I have stonden in ful greet degree  
Abouten lordes of ful heigh estaat;  
Yet hadde I nevere with noon of hem debaat;  
I nevere hem contraried, trewely;  
I woot wel that my lord kan moore than I.  
What that he seith, I holde it ferme and stable;  
I seye the same, or elles thyng semblable.  
A ful greet fool is any conseilour,  
That serveth any lord of heigh honour,  
That dar presume, or elles thenken it,  
That his conseil sholde passe his lordes wit.  
Nay, lordes been no foolis, by my fay!  
Ye han yourselven seyed heer today  
So heigh sentence, so holty and weel,  
That I consente and conferme everydeel  
Yourre wordes alle, and youre opinioun.  
By God, ther nys no man in al this toun,  
Nyn al Ytaille, that koude bet han sayd,  
Crist halt hym of this conseil wel apayd.  
And trewely it is an heigh corage  
Of any man that stapen is in age  
To take a yong wyf; by my fader kyn,  
Your herte hangeth on a joly pyn!  
Dooth now in this matiere right as yow leste,  
for, finally, I holde it for the beste.  
**J**USTINUS, that ay stille sat and herde,  
Right in this wise to Placebo answerde:  
Now, brother myn, be pacient, I prey,  
Syn ye han seyde, and herkneth what I seye.  
Senek among his othere wordes wyse  
Seith that a man oghte hym right wel avyse  
To whom he yeveth his lond or his catel;  
And syn I oghte avyse me right wel  
To whom I yeve my good away fro me,  
Wel muchel moore I oghte avysed be  
To whom I yeve my body for alwey.  
I warne yow wel, it is no childes play  
To take a wyf withoute avysement.  
Men moste enquire, this is myn assent,  
Wher she be wys, or sobre, or dronkelewe,  
Or proud, or elles ootherweys a shrew,  
A chidester, or wastour of thy good,  
Or riche, or poore, or elles mannyssh wood.  
Albeit so that no man fynden shal  
Noon in this world that trotteth hool in al,  
Ne man ne beest, which as men koude devyse;  
But natheles, it oghte ynough suffise  
With any wyf, if so were that she hadde  
Mo goode thewes than hire vices badde.  
And al this axeth leyser for tenquere;  
for, God it woot, I have wept many a teere  
ful pryvely, syn I have had a wyf.  
Preyse whoso wole a wedded mannes lyf,

Certein, I fynde in it but cost and care,  
And observances, of alle blisses bare.  
And yet, God woot, my neighebores aboute,  
And namely of women many a route,  
Seyn that I have the mooste stedefast wyf,  
And eek the mekeste oon that bereth lyf;  
But I woot best where wryngeth me my sho.  
Ye mowe, for me, right as yow liketh do;  
Avyseth yow, ye been a man of age,  
How that ye entren into mariage,  
And namely with a yong wyf and a fair,  
By hym that made water, erthe, and air,  
The yongest man that is in al this route  
Is bisy ynough to brynge in aboute  
To han his wyf allone, trusteth me.  
Ye shul nat plesen hire fully yeres thre,  
This is to seyn, to doon hire ful plesaunce.  
A wyf axeth ful many an observance.  
I prey yow that ye be nat yvele apayd.  
**P**LACEBO, quod this Januarie, & hastow  
sayd?  
Straw for thy Senek, and for thy  
proverbes!  
I counte nat a panyer ful of herbes  
Of scole termes; wyser men than  
thow,  
As thou hast herd, assenteden right now  
To my purpos; Placebo, what sey ye?  
I seye, it is a cursed man, quod he,  
That letteth matrimoine, sikerly.  
And with that word they rysen sodeynly,  
And been assented fully, that he sholde  
Be wedded whanne hym list and wher he wolde.  
**E**LGH fantasie and curious bisynesse  
fro day to day gan in the soule impresse  
Of Januarie aboute his mariage.  
Many fair shap, and many a fair visage  
Ther passeth thurgh his herte, nyght by nyght.  
As whoso toke a mirour poliashed bryght,  
And sette it in a commune market place,  
Thanne sholde he se ful many a figure pace  
By his mirour; and, in the same wyse  
Gan Januarie inwith his thought devyse  
Of maydens, whiche that dwelten hym bisyde.  
He wiste nat wher that he myghte abyde,  
for if that oon have beaute in hir face,  
Another stant so in the peples grace  
for hire sadnesse, and hire benygnytee,  
That of the peple grettest voys hath she.  
And somme were riche, and hadden badde name.  
But natheles, bitwixen earnest and game,  
He atte laste apoynted hym on oon,  
And leet alle othere from his herte goon,  
And chees hire of his owene auctoritee;  
for love is blynd al day, and may nat see.  
And whan that he was in his bed ybrought,  
He purtreied, in his herte and in his thought,  
hir fresche beaute and hir age tendre,  
hir myddel smal, hire armes longe and skilendre,  
hir wise governaunce, hir gentillesse,  
hir wommanly berynge and hire sadnesse.  
And whan that he on hire was condescended,  
hym thoughte his choys myghte nat ben amended.

for whan that he hymself concluded hadde,  
hym thoughte ech oother mannes wit so badde,  
That impossible it were to replye  
Agayn his choys; this was his fantasie.  
**H**IS freendes sente he to, at his instaunce,  
And preyed hem to doon hym that plesaunce,  
That hastily they wolden to hym come;  
He wolde abregge hir labour, alle and some;  
Nedeth namore for hym to go ne ryde,  
He was apoynted ther he wolde abyde.  
**P**LACEBO cam, & eek his freendes soone,  
And alderfirst he bad hem alle a boone,  
That noon of hem none argumentes make  
Agayn the purpos which that he hath take;  
Which purpos was plesant to God, seyde he,  
And verray ground of his prosperitee.  
**H**E seyde, ther was a mayden in the toun,  
Which that of beautee hadde greet renoun,  
Al were it so she were of smal degree;  
Suffiseth hym hir yowthe and hir beautee,  
Which mayde, he seyde, he wolde han to his wyf,  
To lede in ese and hoolynesse his lyf.  
And thanked God that he myghte han hire al,  
That no wight of his blisse parten shal;  
And preyde hem to labouren in this nede,  
And shapen that he faille nat to spede;  
for thanne, he seyde, his spirit was at ese.  
Thanne is, quod he, nothing may me displese,  
Save o thyng priketh in my conscience,  
The which I wol reherce in youre presence.  
**H**AVE, quod he, herd seyde, ful yore ago,  
Ther may no man han parfite blisses two,  
This is to seye, in erthe and eek in hevenc.  
for though he kepe hym fro the synnes sevene,  
And eek from every branche of thilke tree,  
Yet is ther so parfite felicitee,  
And so greet ese and lust in mariage,  
That evere I am agast now in myn age,  
That I shal lede now so myrie a lyf,  
So delicat, withouten wo and stryf,  
That I shal have myn hevenc in crthe heere.  
for sith that verray hevenc is boght so deere  
With tribulacioun and greet penaunce,  
How sholde I thanne, that lyve in swich plesaunce,  
As alle wedded men doon with hire wyvys,  
Come to the blisse ther Crist eterne on lyve ys?  
This is my drede, and ye, my bretheren tweye,  
Assoilleth me this questioun, I prey.  
**J**USTINUS, which that hated his folye,  
Answerde anon, right in his japerie;  
And for he wolde his longe tale abregge,  
He wolde noon auctoritee allegge,  
But seyde, Sire, so ther be noon obstacle  
Oother than this, God of his hygh myracle,  
And of his mercy, may so for yow wirche,  
That, er ye have youre right of hooly chirche,  
Ye may repente of wedded mannes lyf,  
In which ye seyn ther is no wo ne stryf.  
And elles, God forbede but he sente  
A wedded man hym grace to repente  
Wel ofte rather than a sengl man.  
And therefore, sire, the beste reed I kan,  
Dispeire yow noght, but have in youre memorie,